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**An investigation into relationships between the academic performance
of students and parental assistance in a Lesotho high school**

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**A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Education (Educational Administration,
Planning and Social Policy).**

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I hereby declare that this dissertation represents my own original work and has not been nor will be submitted in whole or in part for the award of any degree at any other institution. I further declare that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signature : _____ Date: _____

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Abstract

This study focuses on parental factors that influence academic performance of Form C learners at a high school in Lesotho. It incorporates a review of literature relating to parental involvement in children's schooling. Data collection and analysis focused on factors identified in this review.

Data was collected by means of face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Twenty-four learners at a co-educational high school were interviewed. The respondents were twelve girls and twelve boys. The analysis is guided by a conceptual framework which categorises the data according to the seven forms of parental help and features of family life that emerged from the literature review. The first part of the analysis considers the whole group of 24 learners while the second part compares two sub groups comprising the eight highest achieving and the eight lowest achieving learners. The conclusion discusses the findings in relation to relevant debates in the international literature and literature specific to Lesotho.

The study concludes that in a context where home environments are not conducive to homework and learning in general, there are nonetheless significant differences between the homework practices of the higher and lower achieving learners. Regardless of their academic backgrounds and ability to help with homework, parents or guardians of high achieving learners encourage and motivate learners more than those of the lower achieving learners.

The findings of the study are not intended to be generalisable to a larger population of students. It is an exploratory study that shows how factors that have been shown to be significant in other, largely developed, contexts are realised and interrelated in the context of Lesotho.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

COSC	Cambridge Overseas School Certificate
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
EFA	Education for All
GOL	Government of Lesotho
FPE	Free Primary Education
ISCE	International Standard Classification of Education
JC	Junior Certificate
MOE	Ministry of Education
NPA	National Plan of Action
OBE	Outcome Based Education
SASA	South African Schools Act
SGB	School Governing Body
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Education Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

Aims of the research

The purposes of this study were to identify degrees to which and ways in which parental support and features of family life impact on the performance of Form C learners at a high school in Lesotho, and to compare this impact with regard to higher and lower achieving learners. The study focuses in particular on ways in which parents of learners at this high school assist their children with school and homework.

The research question

Research has shown that parental assistance plays an important role in determining the academic achievement of children (Hill et al, 2004). Hill et al (2004) argue that parents need to be involved in the schooling of their children in a pro-active manner.

Researchers have identified particular ways in which parents influence their children's academic performance and particular features of families relevant to learner achievement. Parental assistance variables include family structure, parents' occupation, parents' education, parents' income, parent-child relationships and parent-child communication, parenting styles, support in school related matters, parent socio-economic status and time parents spend on homework (Kao, 2004; Eunsook and Kit-Hung, 2000; Hao and Brunstead-Bruns, 1998; Wentzel, 1998; Keith et al, 1986). Most researchers attribute an improvement in academic performance to combinations of a few of these variables (Mashile, 2001). The majority of studies do not use the same set of variables which is one of the reasons why their findings do not yield consistent results. This suggests that the relation between parental assistance and enhanced student performance is complex.

In this research, I examine the relationship between key parental assistance variables and learners' academic performance in one high school in Lesotho.

This research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What forms of assistance and supportive features of family life were available to learners in this study?
2. How were these forms of support and features of family life manifested in the context of these learners' lives?
3. What were the patterns of association between high, middle and low achieving learners, on the one hand, and particular forms of support and family features, on the other?

The analysis for this study produces a description of the general profile of the learners' school and homework experiences with their parents at home. It then goes on to compare two sub-groups – the high and low achievers – in relation to particular forms of support.

The nature of this analysis is exploratory. The findings of this study cannot be generalised to all schools. It is a small study designed to contribute to insights into the experiences of a small population group with the expectation that these insights could feed into larger studies.

Rationale

I have been a teacher in a public school and a parent of a child at a private school in Lesotho. I observed that the private school placed much more emphasis on encouraging parents to help their children with their school and homework than did the public school in Lesotho. I was interested in knowing whether parents who help their children in school and homework influence those children's academic performance. I hope that this study will generate insights into the relationship between parental support and learner achievement that is useful to researchers, parents, teachers and school administrators.

The context of education in Lesotho

Lesotho is a small country surrounded by the Republic of South Africa. It is commonly known as 'the kingdom in the sky'. Its population is 2.1 million with a total surface area of 11 720 square miles. It is divided into ten districts namely: Botha-Bothe, Leribe,

Mafeteng, Maseru, Mphahle'shoek, Mphahlotlong, Quthing, Teyateyaneng and Thaba-Tseka. The study took place in Maseru district, which is also the capital city of Lesotho.

The government of Lesotho (GOL) is moving towards the goal of achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE) by the year 2011. In order for the GOL to achieve UPE, it envisages the provision of an equitable basic education for all of the population as a key development goal, at the same time as ensuring acceptable standards (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2002). One of the strategies the government is exploring in order to achieve ten years of UPE is expanding enrolment by eliminating school fees at the primary level (Bureau of Statistics, 2003). Basic education is regarded as an integral component of social and economic development and, as far as the government is concerned, it is considered to be a fundamental human right (MOE, 2002).

A policy of free primary education (FPE) was implemented in Lesotho in 2000. This policy followed a number of national and international initiatives that aimed to improve education provision in the participating countries. The MOE (2002:3) states that the initiatives are:

- Education for All (EFA) Dakar Framework for Action
- World Summit for Children
- Convention on the Rights of the Child and
- Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Education and Training

The EFA Dakar Framework for action is a worldwide initiative to improve basic education, which is based on the principle that education is a fundamental right. The World Summit for children was held in Jonteim in 1990. In the same year, the Lesotho government ratified the declaration of the World Summit for Children and the Plan of Action for children. The GOL policy implementation in relation to the World Summit for children was integrated with the GOL and the United Nations Children's Education Fund (UNICEF) programme of cooperation (MOE, 2002). The GOL/UNICEF facilitated the National Plan of Action (NPA) in 1997-2001. The implementation of the NPA resulted in a number of successes in the education sector, including the

introduction of free and compulsory education and a related increase of attendance rate (MOE, 2002).

The GOL ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the child (CRC) in 1992, which is also closely related to the World Summit for children and the NPA. One of the recommendations for action by the Committee on the Rights of the child was to take measures to motivate parents to encourage their children to enroll and to complete their schooling (MOE, 2002).

The member states of the SADC signed a Protocol on Education and Training in 1997 (MOE, 2002). In the protocol, education and training is identified as a core sub-sector within the SADC Human Resource Development Sector. The rationale for enhanced cooperation is the high importance of literacy and numeracy for the achievement of sustainable development. Provision of basic education at primary and secondary level was identified in the SADC protocol as one of the areas of cooperation. The aim of this initiative was to offer quality education and training programmes at an affordable cost, given that each member state would not be able to offer quality education on its own. All the four initiatives were achieved by the GOL in 2000 when provision of basic education through FPE was implemented. The FPE outcome so far includes increased access, especially for the poorer sections of the population and increased provision of textbooks, classrooms, and teachers. In addition, the GOL has also committed itself to pupil feeding schemes under the FPE programme (UNICEF, 2003).

Basic education in Lesotho covers seven years of primary education (commonly referred to as standards one to seven) and three years of lower secondary education, (commonly referred to as forms A to C). A public examination is written at the end of form C, called the Junior Certificate. Beyond basic education, there is also higher secondary education, (Forms D and E), and tertiary education. There is a common core curriculum that comprises English, Mathematics, Science and Sesotho. Additional subjects include History, Development Studies, Geography, Business Education, Religious Knowledge, Domestic Science and many more (MOE, undated). Students are expected to take a minimum of seven subjects based on the established school curricular guideline for secondary schools. The selection of additional or alternative subjects depends on the individual school curriculum and is decided upon

by each school. The official entry age is thirteen years and fifteen years for completion (Bureau of Statistics, 2003). However, the ages of the learners that this project has investigated in fact range from fifteen to twenty one. At the end of Junior Certificate (JC), pupils take a local school leaving examination.

School governance in Lesotho

The provision and management of education in Lesotho is characterized by a strong partnership between the government and the churches. On the one hand, school ownership and control has remained largely in the hands of the churches, as the churches own and operate 90% of the schools. On the other hand, the government provides school facilities and pays teachers' salaries. Parents pay fees for salaries for teachers that are not employed by the government. Education is widely regarded as a joint responsibility shared by the government, the churches and the community (UNESCO, 2003).

The government has decentralized management to school level management committees, called school governing boards (SGBs), on the grounds that this is considered to improve efficiency (MOE, undated). Thus, school governing boards (SGB's) provide a mechanism for parental involvement in schools. The SGB includes of two representatives of the proprietor who are nominated by the Minister of Education, one of whom one automatically becomes the chair of the board, in the case of public schools. Parents elect three representatives while teachers elect one representative. The Principal automatically assumes the position of secretary of the board of governors while a chief under whose jurisdiction the school falls also automatically assumes membership of the board (MOE, 2002:19).

The responsibilities of the SGBs are related to supervision, management and running of schools and making recommendation to the educational secretary or supervisor with regard to employment of non-government teachers (MOE, 2002).

Problems relating to schooling in Lesotho

There is widespread concern among educators, parents and MOE officials that the quality of secondary education has been declining in Lesotho schools (UNESCO, 2003). In fact, Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) results indicate that only about one-fourth of students pass the final examination. The problem, according to UNESCO (2003), is partly that poor preparation in primary schooling has a negative impact on secondary and post-secondary education.

There is also a problem with teacher qualifications, in that 20% of teachers do not have professional certification (UNESCO, 2003). Many qualified teachers are foreign nationals who do not stay for long periods (UNESCO, 2003). In addition, schools are affected by a lack of specialized facilities such as libraries and laboratories that could help enrich the quality of secondary education (UNESCO, 2003). The school under study does not have a library, though it has two science laboratories.

There are also problems as regards financing of schooling. The learners in this study, the 2005 Form C learners, have not benefited from FPE. This was only implemented in 2000 and the initial beneficiaries were only at standard six level when data was collected for this study in 2005. Therefore, parents of the learners in this study have to pay school fees and book fees.

Primary schooling in Lesotho is characterized by high rates of repetition, with 22% of pupils being held back each year (UNESCO, 2003). This leads to overcrowding. Primary education in Lesotho also suffers from resource problems such as shortages of furniture (UNESCO, 2003).

With regard to learning materials, the MOE has made impressive progress in providing basic textbooks - an average of 4.4 books per primary pupil - through a national book loan scheme, but shortages of supplementary materials such as teachers' guides and pupils' workbooks are still apparent (UNESCO, 2003). Moreover, some schools lack sufficient textbooks because of problems in the distribution system. High schools suffer the same problems as primary schools. There are also shortages of books at secondary schools because of overcrowding at Form A level. This overcrowding

results from the fact that there are fewer secondary schools than primary schools in the whole country.

These problems would suggest that most schools struggle to provide an optimal learning environment. In this context, levels of support provided in learners' homes are of great significance.

The social context of schooling in Lesotho

This study focuses on the role of parents in their children's schooling. The term 'parents' normally refers to biological parents and legal guardians. In the context of Lesotho, an extended family system prevails. This is a family group that consists of parents, children, and other close relatives. The relatives play the role of parents in situations where the biological parents are deceased or have migrated or are absent for other reasons. Consequently, any person taking care of children in a family setting in Lesotho is regarded as a parent. These include biological and legal guardians, adult relatives who take full responsibility for the learners and elder siblings that assume the responsibilities of parents in individual families.

Parental involvement in learners' education is likely to be affected by changes to the structure of families because of HIV/AIDS in Lesotho. HIV/AIDS in Lesotho constitutes an alarming threat to the population due to high death rates. The 2004 Report on the global AIDS epidemic states that in a population of about 2.2 million people in Lesotho, the adult (15-49) prevalence rate is 28.9%. The report also argues that an estimate of AIDS deaths (adults and children) in 2003 was 29 000. Thus, the excessive mortality rate in Lesotho resulting from the AIDS epidemic has resulted in changes in the distribution of population by age and sex.

Cobbe (2004) shows that Lesotho, with an overall HIV-positive rate believed to be among the highest in the world, has the distinction of being the only place in Southern Africa in which more men than women are HIV positive. This is a result of the relative influence of former miners having lived in single sex hostels in the South African mines with access to sex workers. Illness and/or loss of parents due to AIDS is likely to influence parental involvement in the education of children in the Lesotho context.

Lesotho also has the distinction of having a higher proportion of its labour force temporarily employed outside her borders than any other country (Cobbe, 2004). There were 127 000 Basotho mineworkers in 1990 who have decreased to 60 000 in 2003 due to retrenchment. Besides, there are Basotho who have migrated permanently, albeit technically illegally, to South Africa (Cobbe, 2004). Both male and female Basotho seek employment or become self-employed in the large informal sector in South Africa. Many have marginal occupations such as domestic service, hawking goods and running various illegal activities. The majority of these groups are undocumented and unrecorded (clandestine) migrants (Cobbe, 2004). Basotho nurses also have recently been recruited to work in both the United States and the United Kingdom. As a consequence of these various forms of migration within Lesotho and into South Africa and other countries, many parents may not be present at their homes and this is likely to impact on their involvement in their children's schooling.

Internal migration from the rural and some urban areas to places of employment in the town areas has also resulted in demographic changes in households in Lesotho. The past fifteen years has seen a boom in textile and apparel manufacturing industries by Taiwanese investors as well as retail trade and construction by Chinese migrants. According to the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) (2004), Taiwanese industries have employed 20% of the Lesotho workforce from all over the country, the majority of whom are women who have settled in and around their places of employment, mostly in the urban western areas of Lesotho, and this is likely to impact on their involvement in their children's schooling.

There are cultural practices in Lesotho that affect women negatively and are likely to have an impact on who assists children with academic work. In Lesotho gender socialization is entrenched by myths, beliefs and stereotypes (Kimane et al, 1998). This gender socialization has resulted in gender inequalities that impact on the lives of children and women and on the position of women in the family as subordinates within a patriarchal system. There is an assumption that a family must have a male head (Letuka et al, 1998: 38). This legitimizes the subordination of women and enhances men's supremacy. Accordingly, women are limited to certain functions, such as caring for children. The Report on the Situation of Women and Children in Lesotho (Gill and Ambrose, 1994) states that it is usually the responsibility of women in Lesotho to run

the domestic side of the household. They argue that due to migrant labour, women often have the sole responsibility for running the household and bringing up children. This situation puts women in insecure positions because they feel they do not have an equal place in the family.

Another factor that sidelines women in Lesotho is customary law. Under customary law, women are in a subordinate position (Seeiso, 1986); they are perpetual minors and under the guardianship of someone else, always a man. As a result, women are answerable to men, as are children. Therefore, according to customary law in Lesotho, women are minors, the position held by their children.

Thus, in general, participation of working class and poor families in their children's education is constrained by lack of employment, low educational level of parents and lack of support programmes that encourage full participation of parents in their children's education. Demographic factors such as high mortality rates, supposedly resulting from HIV/AIDS, and migration are likely to impact on parental involvement. In addition, culture and laws that govern the roles of women in their households are also likely to impact on parental involvement in the education of their children.

The context of the school under study

The school at which this study was conducted is a public school in Maseru, the capital city of Lesotho. It is within three kilometers of the city center. Since it is a public school, the government is responsible for building and maintaining classrooms and for payment of teachers' salaries. Parents pay fees to supplement the government subsidy. The school has a roll of about six hundred pupils. It serves working class and poor students. It offers both lower secondary (Forms A-C) and higher secondary (Forms D-E) school education. Learners in this school are bound to wear school uniform. Many learners use public transport to travel to and from school though many parents are poor and so have difficulties paying the fees.

The learners in this study were in Form C when data was collected in 2005. All of these learners had progressed from Form B in 2004 as Form C learners who fail are not allowed to remain at this school to repeat Form C.

There are six hundred and fifty learners at the school. The school staff comprises a principal and her deputy, four heads of departments and twenty-two teachers. Typical class sizes were in the twenties throughout the school. All except one of the teachers at the school are qualified. This one unqualified teacher has attended all four years of a university programme, but did not get a certificate because she did not complete the requirements for the degree. The board of governors, as the top most body in the hierarchy, runs the school. Parents comprise thirty-seven percent (37%) of membership of the board of governors. These parents are not necessarily educated. There is also no clear policy on parental involvement that is directly associated with classroom instruction. Further, there is no homework policy that binds parents to actively participate in their children's homework.

Performance of Form C learners at the school under study

The general performance of the Form C learners at this school is not impressive. The majority of Form C learners who passed in 2003 and 2004 obtained low grades (D-E) in all the subjects, as is shown in Table 1 below. This pattern is found throughout all grades at the school, which is considered to be a poor performing school.

Table 1: Performance of Form C learners, 2003 and 2004

SUBJECT	YEAR	GRADES						TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS	% PASS	% FAIL
		A	B	C	D	E	F			
ENGLISH	03	-	01	16	40	33	14	104	88	12
	04	-	02	16	37	55	22	132	83	17
MATHEMATICS	03	00	02	03	04	16	78	104	25	75
	04	-	-	-	06	12	11 4	132	13	87
DEVELOPMENT STUDIES	03	-	-	01	04	13	28	46	39	61
	04	-	02	04	16	19	22	63	65	35
HISTORY	03	-	-	06	07	06	07	26	73	27
	04	-	-	01	06	12	19	38	50	50
GEOGRAPHY	03	-	-	-	04	14	51	69	26	74
	04	-	-	05	18	16	62	101	39	61
WOODWORK	03	-	-	07	07	09	10	33	70	30
	04	-	-	02	05	11	12	30	60	40
NEEDLEWORK	03	-	-	05	11	05	-	21	100	00
	04	-	-	04	17	07	03	31	90	10
SESOTHO	03	01	07	48	37	10	01	104	99	01
	04	01	16	38	43	24	09	132	93	07
SCIENCE	03	-	02	01	18	50	34	104	68	32
	04	-	-	01	15	50	67	132	50	50
BUSINESS EDUCATION	03	-	03	05	18	30	31	104	84	16
	04	-	01	02	15	29	48	132	72	28

Source: School records.

Average pass for all subjects in 2003 was 61%

Average pass for all subjects in 2004 was 67%

Summary and chapter outline

This chapter introduced and provided a rationale for the study. The research question was presented and the background to schooling in Lesotho was discussed.

Chapter two presents a review of literature on factors relating to parental support and the relation of such support to academic achievement. The review considers literature from both developed and developing countries.

Chapter three presents the research methodology. It describes the instrument used in collecting data and discusses ethical considerations.

Chapter four analyses the data and reports on the results of the study.

Chapter five offers some conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter I review relevant literature from both developed and developing countries. The literature shows the importance of parental involvement and particular features of family life with regard to learners' academic performance. This chapter draws on the literature to identify forms of parental influence on learners' performance that will be considered in this study.

Literature from developed countries

Parents are believed to play a significant role in the education of their children, worldwide. Studies have been carried out in different parts of the world to find out if parents who help their children with academic work enhance their academic performance. Parents' actions vary both in form and in consequence, since some forms of parental involvement in their children's academic work are more effective than others. However, it is generally accepted that parents are responsible for the education of their children even though forms of involvement vary (Eunsook and Kit-Hung, 2000; Hao and Bonstead-Bruns, 1998; Wentzel, 1998; Keith et al, 1986; Zhang and Carrasquillo, 1995).

Parental involvement can be understood in terms of the social relations of education which, in Bourdieu's terms, is a specific field of social activity with its own logics of practice (LiPuma, 1993). Central to education as a field of social activity is the issue of 'capital' as a defining feature within and between fields. According to LiPuma (1993), Bourdieu's notion of capital entails the capacity to exercise control over one's own future and that of others. Harker (1990) state that, in Bourdieu's terms, capital includes material things as well as untouchable culturally significant attributes that have a potential capacity to produce profits. Thus, parents have the capacity to enhance the academic performance of their children through the provision of cultural and material resources that aid learning. Parental attributes constitute resources that aid the achievement of learners (Field, 2003). Therefore, children who lack parental resources

that aid learning are less likely to succeed at school, or can only succeed with difficulty.

According to Bourdieu (1986), capital can present itself in three fundamental guises as cultural, economic and social capitals. These forms of capital are briefly explained below en route to categorizing the features of parental assistance according to Bourdieu's different forms of capital.

Cultural capital includes education as well as cultural resources acquired in the home. Cultural resources include family lifestyles and consumption patterns (Harker, 1990). These resources entail access to early domestic education, which aids learning that is compatible with the school. Thus, capital rewards gained in the home may be transferred to the school. Educational institutions are structured to favour those who already possess cultural capital (Harker, 1990). The culture of the elite is so similar to that of the school that working class children can only acquire with great effort something which is given to the children of the educated middle class (Harker, 1990).

Field (2003) quotes Bourdieu as saying that cultural capital explains the unequal achievement of children originating from different social classes by relating academic success to the distribution of cultural capital between classes. Accordingly, by "pursuing the appropriate 'cultural investment strategies' within the family, some social groups are able to ensure that their children optimize the yield from education" (Field, 2003: 16). For example, the features of parental assistance that constitute cultural capital include time that learners spend on homework, educational status of parents and the participation of parents in school activities.

Another form of capital is economic capital, which, as Bourdieu (1986: 252) states, "is at the root of all other types of capital". Parents who have access to an income or wealth use it to supplement school instruction. Bourdieu (1986) also indicates that economic capital combined with other forms of capital creates and reproduces inequality between families. Parents use their economic and human capital effectively as resources in their parental roles. The presence of these forms of parental capital is believed to impact on children's educational attainment. However, parents with less abundant economic capital may still be able to use social capital efficiently and

effectively so as to have a positive effect on their children's educational achievement (Coleman, 1990, 1988).

Social capital refers to the "sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 332). Wong (1998) identified the social capital of the family as the relationships between children and parents that are useful for the development of a child. Social relationships are possible influences on children's motivations, behaviors, and educational attainment and include supportive ties that create favourable learning conditions to enhance children's performance (Wong, 1998). Kao (2004) identifies some examples of social capital as warm parent-child relationships, good parent-child communication and a stable family structure. Children's and parents' educational aspirations in an interactive environment serve as a resource that enhances educational outcome (Kao, 2004: 174). All these forms of social capital are treated as positive attributes of academic performance (Portes, 1998).

Key features of parental assistance associated with learners' academic achievement have been identified in the literature. These features can be seen in relation to the three different forms of capital. The three forms of capital are intertwined. To illustrate this, parents that have got cultural capital such as higher educational status are likely to have the kind of relationships with their children (social capital) that positively influence educational attainment. These parents are more likely to create favourable learning conditions for their children and to provide material goods (economic capital) that aid learning. The assumption is that parents who are educated understand better which resources support learning and enhance academic achievement. Thus, both cultural and social capitals are attached to economic capital.

The next section discusses in detail the key features of parental assistance associated with learners' academic achievement as identified in the literature.

The time that learners spend on homework

Time spent on homework is one of the characteristics of parental assistance widely attributed to improved learner performance. Keith et al (1992) carried out a study that investigated important factors that influence school learning, especially those influences that are potentially manipulable. Parental involvement in students' academic and social lives, time spent doing homework, and leisure TV viewing are the three variables generally considered to influence achievement. They are variables that may also be interrelated. Keith et al's direct and indirect effects of TV time, homework and parental involvement on high school seniors' achievement were investigated. The study suggested that high ability youth seem to spend more time studying than do their less able peers. This was linked to parental involvement in that parents may increase the amount of time their children spend on homework and indirectly influence their children's achievement by becoming involved in their educational and social lives. Cooper (1994) also reports that students who do more homework perform better. He adds that the correlation between time spent on homework and achievement is higher for high school students than elementary students and students in the middle grades.

Time spent watching TV has important effects on the achievement of high school students. In general, the more often students watched TV, the worse their academic achievement (Keith et al, 1986). Nevertheless, it appears that increased TV viewing more adversely affects high-ability seniors than middle and low-ability youth (Keith et al, 1986). Many parents restrict their children from engaging in out of school activities such as watching TV at the cost of their school work. Thus, parental involvement in regulating the time for TV viewing in order to access time to do homework is directly related to academic achievement.

A study by Eunsook and Kit-Hung (2000) on preferred homework environment in high versus low achieving Chinese students made a clear link between motivation and parental involvement and time spent on homework. It was found that high achieving students were more self-motivated, persistent and responsible in doing homework than were low achieving students. Parents of high achieving learners motivated students to have positive attitudes towards doing homework (Eunsook and Kit-Hung,

2000). These parents assisted their children through provision of an environment that influenced children to take responsibility for their homework with the result that they scored high marks on their homework. This parental involvement in their children's education also affects the amount of time that learners spend on homework.

Another study carried out by Xu (2004) at Mississippi University on family help and homework management in rural and urban secondary schools, found that high school students benefit from having an adult available in the home to help with homework. They found that there were positive effects on study habits when adults provided clear expectations for children about "where, when and how to complete homework, regardless of the helper's educational background" (Xu, 2004: 178)

Some studies from developing countries suggest that although time spent on homework is related to academic performance, homework exacerbates existing social inequalities (Anderson, 1986). Not all homes have adult help available to adolescents doing homework. Students from lower socio-economic homes tend to have more difficulties completing their homework than do their peers from affluent families. Parents from lower socio economic backgrounds often have lower levels of education and lack skills required to help their children with homework. Poorer parents are also less capable of providing their children with material resources that enhance learning as Bourdieu (1986) argued. In addition, poorer students are often employed after school and weekends, or have to attend to family chores or may not have homes where conditions are conducive to doing homework (Anderson, 1986).

Anderson (1986) argues that the quality of homework is not always a reflection of learners' ability because learners copy from each other, or have their homework done by others, including parents. This contributes to inequalities between learners who have access to this kind of support and those who do not.

Parents' educational status

The literature indicates that the educational status of parents influences learners' academic performance. Harker (1990) and Wong (1998) argue that parents with high

levels of education provide cognitive environments that are conducive to children's learning, and the fathers' education generally measures this type of capital.

Hao and Bonstead-Bruns (1998) surveyed parents' involvement in children's learning among eighth graders in America from four immigrant groups (Chinese, Filipino, Korean, and Mexican) and three native groups (Mexican, black and white). The study reveals that parents' educational levels are associated with high parents' expectations and thus have indirect positive effects on students' academic performance.

A study by Grebow (1973) that investigated the relationship of some parental variables to achievement in college girls indicates that both parents with low and higher educational status became involved in the education of their children to support their academic performance. However, the fathers' levels of education, but not the mothers', was associated with the achievement of daughters.

According to Hoover-Dempsey (1992), less educated parents spend more time on homework in comparison with more highly educated parents, because they have less adequate knowledge of effective helping strategies or they may be responding to a pattern of greater school difficulty experienced by their children. Hoover-Dempsey (1992) also points out that because many parents with lower levels of education are also unemployed, they may simply have more time for their children's homework activities than do the other parent groups.

In countries where English is the language of education, parents who do not speak English are often also less educated. Such parents are at a disadvantage in their attempts to support their children (Pena, 2000: 46).

Parents' participation in school activities

While parents with less education may lack knowledge of strategies for helping their children with schoolwork, they may compensate to some degree by actively communicating with teachers and schools. Parents who take the initiative to attend school programmes, meetings and workshops become informed and knowledgeable on how to assist their children in support of their academic achievement (Pena, 2000).

When parents become informed about ways of assisting their children they also keep track of their children's schoolwork and this improves their relationships with teachers and hence learners' academic achievement (Pena, 2000). Parents who attend school activities network with other parents and get advice from other parents on ways of assisting their children with schoolwork or study habits that may bring about positive results at school (Field, 2003).

This was supported by a study by Muller (1998) in America that investigated gender differences in parental involvement and adolescents' mathematics achievement. The study found that students whose parents attended school events also had slightly higher test scores. However, parents' attendance at school meetings is associated more positively with girls' achievement than with boys' (Muller, 1998).

Willmon (1969) carried out a study in America that examined the effect of parental participation in a Head Start program on learners' academic achievement. The results show that results improved for those pupils whose parents participated actively in the Head Start programmes. The findings indicate that, for this population, the influence of highly active parent involvement in the Head Start appeared to serve as an intervening variable that influenced learners' academic motivation.

Parents' income

In addition to parental involvement in school activities, parents' income plays a significant role in learners' academic performance. For many families, parents' income determines the quality of schooling that their children receive. A review of research on predictors of parent involvement in children's schooling shows that the higher the socio-economic status of the mother, the greater the tendency to be involved in her children's education (Orr, 2003; Grolnick et al, 1997; Hofferth et al, 1998 and Hoover-Demsey, 1995). Access to an income may result in access to programmes that may enable parents to develop their capacity to help their children with schoolwork (Grolnick et al, 1997). In addition, children from wealthier families have higher expectations and this indirectly influences their achievement (Hofferth et al, 1998).

Parent-child relationships

Parent-child relationships are strongly associated with academic performance. Wentzel (1998) carried out a study in America on adolescents' supportive relationships with parents, teachers and peers in relation to motivation at school. The participants in the study were from sixth - through eighth - grades in a suburban, predominantly middle class community school. Final grades in English, Science, Social Studies and Mathematics were used as indices of achievement. The results of the study suggested that family supportive cohesion is significantly related to motivational and academic outcomes. According to Grebow (1973: 208),

High achievement motivation is associated with parental emphasis on and pressure for academic achievement, in the context of a warm parent-child relationship. Fathers who put less emphasis on intellectual values and achievement for their daughters have daughters who place more value on women's role behaviors and hence their low academic performance. On the contrary, fathers who stress achievement and intellectual proficiency, and whose relationship with their daughters is perceived as a warm one, have daughters who, for the most part, do not ascribe to the traditional and stereotyped women's role values, hence their enhanced academic achievement.

The father, according to Grebow (1973), has a greater influence on fostering high intellectual values in his daughter than does the mother.

In a warm parent-child relationship, the child is interested in pleasing a parent who shows faith in his ability, and this may increase motivation and thus offset a lack of early cognitive capacities (Willmon, 1969). A warm parent-child relationship, as Hao and Bonstead-Bruns (1998) argue, entails a shared family expectation that greatly enhances student's academic achievement. 'Parent-child interactions in learning increase parents' and children's expectations through which students' achievement improves' (Hao and Bonstead-Bruns, 1998:191). Coleman (1990) identifies the social capital of the family as the relationship between children and parents. Social capital and supportive ties establish favorable conditions for engaging and advancing in the educational system (Coleman, 1990). Thus, warm relationships forged by parents with their children are associated with learners' academic achievement.

Although many working class parents do understand the value of education, and are willing to spend time with their children talking about school work, the warm relationships and interactions may be hindered by the parents' lack of education. This may 'inhibit communication between parents and children, and cause a qualitative deficit in academic performance' (Willmon, 1969: 407).

Parent-child communication

A good parent-child relationship is related to how much the learners talk about school work with their parents. Such talk influences academic performance (Ramirez, 2001). In a longitudinal study on gender differences in parental involvement and adolescents' mathematics achievement, Muller (1998) examined the relationship between parental involvement and achievement levels of public school students in Austin Texas. The eighth grade students completed survey questionnaires about their backgrounds such as home lives, schoolwork, student gender, parent's highest educational levels and family income. Muller (1998) found out that test scores are strongly associated with how much the students talked with their parents about school. However, talking about school is associated more positively with the girls' gains than boys'. Muller suggests that fathers tend to speak to their sons about disciplinary matters while they are more likely to talk to their daughters about the content of their schoolwork (Muller, 1998).

Grolnick et al (1997) found that mothers are also more likely to discuss schoolwork with daughters than with sons. Mothers perceive their boys and girls as needing different kinds of support. Mothers tend to talk more with girls and withhold resources from boys given that boys are seen as relatively independent. This helps girls to achieve better scores than boys, as parents also restrict the girls' out-of-school activities more than those of boys. Grolnick et al's (1997) findings also show that having a difficult context, such as parents who see their children as difficult to discipline, may make it hard for parents to attend to their children's work. This may affect their academic achievement.

In a study that examined factors associated with underachievement in seventh-grade children in California, Mufson et al (1989) found that underachievers had less ability to

communicate with their parents, believed that their parents were less interested in their schoolwork, and needed more prodding from their parent to complete their schoolwork (Mufson et al, 1989). Compared with achievers, the underachievers believed that their parents were less strict. Siblings of these underachievers were reported to have similar school records. On the other hand, "the achievers thought that they could communicate well with their parents and that their parents, though very strict, were interested and able to help them with schoolwork" (Mufson, 1989: 9). The style of parenting of the achievers in this study is consistent with Mashile (2001) and Dornbuch et al's (1987) idea that permissive parenting is not correlated with good grades in school. "The form of parenting that is characterized as 'authoritative' is positively related to school performance" (Dornbuch et al, 1987:1252). The study suggests that strict parents are more likely to create time for their children to do their schoolwork.

Family structure

Hao and Bonstead-Bruns (1998) surveyed parents' involvement in children's learning among eighth graders in the United States. They found that family structure was important to children's schooling. An intact family structure was positively associated with Grade Point Average (Hao and Bonstead-Bruns, 1998). An intact family structure, according to Hao and Bonstead (1998) refers to both parents (neither of whom is a step-parent) being present. This often enables parents to provide more coherent supervision at home, which leads to greater effort and better behavior at school with positive effects on students' achievement (Hao and Bonstead-Bruns, 1998). Hofferth et al (1998) add that children from one-parent families are more likely to drop out than are children from two-parent families. In addition, children in single-parent families are disadvantaged because their parents lack the time and attention that two parents could provide (Hofferth et al, 1998 and McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). As Marjoribanks, (1979) argues:

... the amount of parental attention which each child receives decreases as the number of children in the family increases in such way that with each additional child the successive decrements in shared attention become smaller. Therefore, the 'expected' percentages of parental attention given children in, say, one-, two-, three-, four-,

and five- child families would approximate 100, 50, 33, 25 and 20 respectively. Thus, single children in families may score higher in cognitive tests because they receive all available parental stimulation, whereas children with four siblings may have lower performance scores because they receive more like one-fifth of the available stimulation (1979: 58)

Hofferth et al (1998) agree that the number of siblings in a single-parent family is an important indicator of the dilution of attention to children, with single parents less able to devote personal time to each as the number of children increases.

Chin and Phillips (2004) conducted a study on social reproduction and child-rearing practices in Los Angeles. They found that working-class and poor children, whose parents have fewer resources, use their own social capital, effort, and imaginations to substitute at least to some extent for their parents' lack of resources. In addition, they agree that working class and poor families view a "child's development as unfolding spontaneously, as long as they are provided with comfort, food, shelter, and other basic support" (Chin and Phillips, 2004).

The next section reviews literature from developing countries, and especially from Southern Africa.

Literature from Southern Africa

The literature emerging from Southern Africa does not address the features of parental support discussed above. Instead the focus is on participation in governance and on the social and economic environment, and ways in which these impact on parents' capacity and child support.

One way in which parents in developing countries are involved in their children's education is through the self-governance of schools, as is the case in developed countries. The idea of involving parents in school governing bodies is to improve the quality of education through accountability and responsiveness to parents (Smyth, 2002). In practice this responsiveness is often very narrowly defined. Christie and Potterton (1997) carried out a study in South Africa that was aimed at building

knowledge of schools operating in difficult circumstances as a contribution to policy for school quality enhancement and school development. In the study, parents were found to perceive schools as carrying the responsibility for their children in education. In some schools, parents' involvement is based on the rationale that parents are the fee-paying constituency and their involvement takes the form of payment, with minimal academic involvement.

The South African Schools Act (SASA) (1996) envisages a partnership between parents and schools to ensure quality education, and improve learners' performance. The introduction of Outcome-based Education (OBE) in South Africa was also expected to encourage greater parental involvement in children's education. Mbokodi et al (2003) state that 90% of parents do not know much about OBE, the success of which depends on both parents and teachers. They argue that a lack of involvement of parents has limited the success of OBE in South Africa and contributed to learners' low academic performance. The study also shows that parental involvement in the education of historically disadvantaged communities has been beset with problems that undermine initiatives to promote involvement. Mbokodi et al (2003) state that some of the factors that discourage involvement of black parents include:

- Unemployment and poverty which constrains parents' capacity to provide books and learning materials necessary for successful study
- Low levels of parental education which discourages parents from helping their children with schoolwork
- Lack of support programmes that empower black parents to participate fully and meaningfully in education

Smit and Liebenberg (2003) undertook a study to understand the realities and dynamics facing parents when attempting to be involved in their children's schooling. The focus was on parents in extreme poverty in Cape Town, South Africa. The study found that parental stress results in reduced parental involvement and strained parent-child relationships. The stress is caused by the ultimatums set by the schooling system and its staff due to the disregard and lack of understanding of the realities of poor communities with parents being unable to fund their children's education.

Legotlo et al (2002) investigated the perceptions of stakeholders on causes of poor performance in Grade 12, in a province in South Africa. They found that 17.08% had primary education, while 60.13% of parents had reached the secondary level of education. 13.4% of Grade 12 learners had parents with no schooling whilst 5.92% had college diplomas, 2.79% had first degrees and 0.65% had post-graduate education up to and higher than the secondary level. They concluded that, "in developing strategies for helping Grade 12 learners, the ability of the parents to intervene cannot be overemphasized" (Legotlo et al, 2002: 114).

Conclusions from the literature review

The above review identified key features of family structure and parental assistance that influence learners' academic achievement. These factors are briefly summarized here as they provide the main foci for the conceptual framework for this study. The first of these is the parent-child relationship. The kind of relationship that promotes academic performance is a warm one that links supportive relationships to aspects of motivation. In such relationships children wish to please parents who show confidence in their ability by working hard and producing good results.

A second feature of supportive parenting is parent-child communication that involves both or either of the parents talking to their children about schoolwork. However, patterns of communications are gendered. Fathers communicate with their sons about disciplinary matters and mothers talk more with girls about schoolwork. Communication that focuses on school work is more likely to contribute to achievement.

Time spent on homework is the third feature of parental assistance. This involves parents setting aside time to help children with homework and allowing, creating and increasing time for children to do their homework.

Parental participation in school activities comprises the fourth feature of parental assistance believed to enhance academic performance. Parents who attend school

meetings are likely to be better informed and more knowledgeable about ways of assisting their children with school work.

The fifth feature of positive parental support relates to the educational status of parents. Educated parents are believed to create a learning environment that is conducive to children's learning because such parents have competence to help their children with schoolwork. Although those less educated parents who are unemployed may have more time, their incompetence may hinder them from productively helping their children with school work. In addition, for disadvantaged parents who are not mother tongue speakers of English, English as a medium of instruction at schools is a barrier to helping children.

Students' academic achievement is also affected by parents' income. It is generally believed that parents with a higher economic status have a greater tendency to get involved in their children's education. These parents are also able to use their financial resources to aid their children's education.

The last feature of parental support relates to family structure. In an intact family where both parents are present, family relations are believed to be closer and more coherent, making it easier to supervise their children's schoolwork. Children from these families tend to be better behaved at school and therefore more likely to accomplish positive academic performance. Single parent families are more likely to lack time and attention to help their children with school work.

Conceptual framework

Significant factors relating to parental assistance identified from the literature comprise a framework to study the features of parental assistance associated with learners' academic achievement in this study.

This framework guides the design of the study which is aimed to collect and analyse data with regard to the following factors.

- Child-parent relationship. For example, the parents' knowledge of the whereabouts of children demonstrates this relationship.
- Parent-child communication. This refers to both or either parents/guardians talking to their children about schoolwork
- Time spent on homework. This involves parents setting aside time to help children with homework or allowing, creating and increasing time for children to do their homework
- Parental participation in school activities
- Educational status of parents
- Parents' income and
- Family structure.

CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the research design for the study. It accounts for selection of the learners who participated in the study and also explains the processes undertaken for the development of the research instrument used for gathering data. In addition, this chapter describes the pilot study carried out at a preliminary stage of this research. Further, it outlines the procedure for data collection and analysis. Lastly, ethical considerations are discussed.

Research design

The aim of this study is to identify factors associated with parental support that contribute towards academic performance of a group of high school learners in Lesotho. It describes the particular forms that these factors take and the ways that they are interrelated. A qualitative methodological approach has been adopted. This approach is common in research relating to problems requiring depth of insight in understanding actions and meanings in their social context. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001), a qualitative research approach is:

... inquiry in which researchers collect data in face-to-face situations by interacting with selected persons in their settings (field research). Qualitative research describes and analyses people's individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions (2001:395).

This research is largely a face-to-face interview based study supplemented by data drawn from documentary texts. The interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview schedule. The questions related to features of parental assistance argued in the literature to influence students' academic achievement. In addition, documents were collected. These were mark sheets recording achievement of learners in the study in 2003 and 2004.

Site and selection of learners

The study was carried out at a school in Maseru city in Maseru district, which is located in the western part of Lesotho. The subjects for this study comprise learners selected from one grade in one school that is located in the central region of schools in Lesotho. The selection of the school and learners was purposeful in relation to the requirements of the study and opportunistic with regard to access. Ease of access to the participants was possible because contact had already been established while I was carrying out a similar study in 2003 at the same school on a smaller scale.

The learners selected for the study were in Form C when data was collected in 2005. The 2005 Form C group did not include failures from the 2004 Form C group as the school does not allow Form C failures to return to the school the following year. The learners who scored below forty percent while doing Form B in 2004 were also not included in the 2005 Form C group because they were repeating Form B. Thus, all the learners in the 2005 Form C group had progressed from Form B at the end of 2004.

Only twenty-four learners were included in the study. These were selected according to gender and achievement. This number enabled me to include four girls and four boys at each of the three different levels of achievement, low middle, and high. Equal numbers of boys and girls were selected. The mark sheets for the Form B learners for December 2004 were used to select the twenty-four participants. From these, eight of each category of high, average and low performing learners was selected with four boys and four girls at each performance level. Thus, an equal number of boys and girls in each of the performance levels were selected. The average scores of individual learners ranged from 40% to 77%. Learners who obtained average scores ranging from 64% to 77%, which are the highest scores for the group, are referred to as high achievers in this study. Learners who obtained scores between 40% and 50% are referred to as low achievers.

The respondents were divided into three groups of high, middle and low achievers. The first part of the analysis considered the circumstances and experiences of all 24 learners. The second part of the analysis developed a comparison between two sub groups of learners: the top eight achievers and the lowest eight achievers.

As twenty-four is a relatively small number of learners, it will not be possible to make any claims about the generalisability of the findings from this study to the broader population of the learners in Lesotho. It is not the purpose of this study to make such claims. Instead, the purpose is exploratory with regard to factors associated with parental support for learner achievement. I am interested in knowing

- whether the factors that have been identified in the literature as being important in influencing academic performance in developed countries have relevance in a Lesotho context, and
- how these factors are realized, or what they mean, and how they are interrelated in the lives of learners in this context.

Development of the interview schedule

An interview schedule was constructed in order to collect data from the participants. The interview questions were formulated in relation to features of parental assistance identified in the literature review in chapter two. These features include:

- Parent-child relationship
- Parent-child communication
- The time that learners spend on homework
- Parental participation in school activities
- The educational status of parents
- Parents' income and
- Family structure.

The interview schedule was open enough to enable me to request detailed complex answers by probing and prompting responses with regard to topics that may have been difficult to ask about straightforwardly. This strategy also enabled respondents to raise issues that I may not have considered before the interview. In addition, the respondents could ask me to clear up ambiguous questions or explain unfamiliar words (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 2002).

The pilot study

When the interview schedule was ready, it was piloted with one grade ten and one grade eleven pupil. The purpose of the pilot was to identify possible problems with the instrument prior to its actual administration. According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), a pilot study helps the researcher to check for the clarity of the questions, administration time and the sequence of the questions. The pilot study also identifies errors in the administration of the research instrument. In addition, the pilot study creates an opportunity for revision, reworking and sometimes for a complete overhaul of the instrument before the actual study takes place (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999).

In the first pilot, with a grade ten learner in Cape Town, the interview was conducted in English. Following this pilot I rearranged the sequencing of the questions. I also realized that I needed to be more conversant with the interview questions in order to have the interview flow as a continuous conversation rather than to proceed in a disjointed question and answer manner.

The second pilot of the improved interview schedule was held with a grade eleven learner in Cape Town. The interview was carried out as a face-to-face interview in Sesotho, the learner's first language, which was also the language that would be used for the main interviews. The same procedures were followed in the pilot as would be followed in the main interviews with regard to the way in which the study was introduced to the learner and to ethical matters such as assurances of confidentiality. No changes were made to the interview schedule following the second pilot.

Administration of the interview schedule

The interviews for the actual study took place in April 2005. Appointments with the school principal were formally arranged telephonically in January 2005 and confirmed in April the same year. I met with the principal to explain more fully what the purpose of the research was and how the interviews would be conducted. The principal introduced me to the particular group of learners selected for the study. I then explained the purpose of the study to the group and discussed how the interviews would be conducted. Respondents were assured that their participation in the study

was voluntary. Thus, if they were not willing to take part in the study, they were free to decline the invitation to participate.

The principal of the school organized a quiet, private, comfortable room, normally used as a preparation room in the laboratory for junior classes where the interviews were conducted. It took a month to collect data from the twenty-four participants. The actual interviews took place during lunch hour and after school. Each interview took from fifteen to twenty minutes. A continuous flowing conversation was sometimes interrupted when the interviewees had to go back to classes or home after school hours. When this happened, I explained that we would continue from where we had stopped the next time we met.

The actual interviews were carried out in Sesotho, which is the medium of communication of learners in Lesotho. This allowed me to talk with the learners with ease and they responded without difficulty in their mother tongue.

The interview schedule ensured a degree of consistency of questions across all participants. However, I adapted the schedule to the responses of each learner by probing and prompting.

In order to ensure that interviewees would not be uneasy when permission to use the audio-tape was requested, introductory remarks were made pertaining to the use of the audio-tape before the interview session started. For example, it was explained that verbatim information is needed to avoid misinterpreting what they said during the interview. It was also explained that the recorded conversation was going to be listened to by the interviewer and by nobody else.

Each participant was sincerely thanked at the end of the interview. Individual learners were asked if they could be contacted for clarification if necessary when I transcribed the interview and the request was always granted. I wrote notes about the interview as soon as the interview was over. In these notes, I recorded anything that was not obvious from the recording such as interesting things that were discussed while the tape-recorder was switched off.

The complete interviews were transcribed verbatim regardless of whether the content appeared to be relevant or irrelevant. The reason is that the meaning of what was being said in an interview can usually only be interpreted in the context of the sentence that surrounds it and the conversation as a whole (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 2002).

Documentary data

Achievement data for this group of learners, in the form of mark sheets for the December 2004 examinations, were obtained from school records. The final average percentage scores of these subjects were used as indices of learners' achievement (Wentzel, 1998). These scores were used to compare the performance levels of the learners who participated in this study. The performance of Form C learners drawn from the 2003 and 2004 final examinations results were also obtained from the school records.

Ethical considerations

The privacy of participants was an important dimension of the study. I requested very sensitive information about the home circumstances of participants, some of whom did not have either or both parents. According to Warwick and Bulmer (1993), the issue of informed consent pertains to access to the schools where research is to be conducted and the acceptance by those whose permission one needs. The learners who participated in the study were aged from fourteen to twenty-one. The majority of these learners were sixteen years or older when interviewed. They were considered to be responsible enough to decide whether to participate in the interview or not. I did not ask their parents for permission to interview them because, in the context of Lesotho, the school takes responsibility for interactions between researchers and learners. I explained the research purpose and procedure clearly to the participants before the research began. Respondents were assured that their freedom to participate in the study was voluntary. Thus, if they were not willing to take part in the study, they were not obliged to participate. Respondents were also assured that the names of the participating schools and their names were not going to be revealed in the study.

The school where data was collected as well as the sponsor made it possible to carry out this research. The school provided access to its premises while the sponsor provided funds to carry out the process of the study. They were both promised a copy of the final report of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR - DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The first part of this chapter outlines the approach to analysis. The second part presents the analysis itself. This analysis has been guided by a conceptual framework which categorises the data according to the seven forms of parental help and features of family life that emerged from the literature review in chapter two. The literature review in chapter two concluded that particular forms of parental assistance and family features enhance learners' academic achievement (Eunsook and Kit-Hung, 2000; Field, 2003; Keith et. al., 1996 Portes, 1998; Wentzel, 1998; Wong, 1998; Harker, 1990; Willmon, 1969). These family features and parental help are:

- Family structure. This refers to whether households are headed by both or a single parent or relatives or a sibling and also refers to the number of siblings. Family structure is believed to influence the learners' study environment at home which in turn influences the achievement of individual learners.
- Parent-child relationship. This pertains to the degree to which there is an open relationship that parents have with their children. For example the parents' knowledge of the whereabouts of their children demonstrates that there is an open relationship. An open relationship entails an environment conducive to learning.
- Parent-child communication regarding schoolwork. This refers to both or either parents or guardians routinely talking to their children about schoolwork. Such communication indicates that parents show an interest in, and support, their children with regard to schoolwork;
- Time spent on homework. This refers to parents ensuring that children's time is set aside for homework as well as to parents setting aside their own time to help children with homework.
- Educational status of parents. This refers to parents' levels of education which is believed to influence the degree to which parents are believed to be capable of helping their children with school work;
- Parents' income. This is believed to influence the degree to which parents are able to provide their children with learning aids and a material environment conducive to study.

- Parental participation in school activities. The literature suggests that parents who attend school meetings are likely to gain information and insight regarding how best to help their children with school work.

The interviewees' responses to interview questions were transcribed verbatim and then coded according to these seven categories. However, general communication was collapsed into child-parent relationships and time spent on homework. The interaction between the parents and their children was evident in the relationships they had. Within this relationship, they also communicated about homework. Consequently, the seven categories were reduced to six.

The presentation of the analysis is in two parts. The first part offers a description of the experiences of the group as a whole that is all twenty-four learners. This section addresses the following two questions:

- What forms of assistance and family features were available to learners in this study?
- How were these forms of support and features of family life manifested in the context of these learners' lives?

I compared the support given to high and low achievers, in relation to these categories to answer the following questions:

The second part compares two sub groups, the eight highest achievers and the eight lowest achievers. This section of the analysis responds to the following question:

- What were the patterns of association between high and low achieving learners, on the one hand, and particular forms of support and family features, on the other?

The analysis describes forms of support received by all twenty four learners. However, comparisons made between sub-groups of learners focus on differences between the high and low achieving groups.

In this analysis, the participants are identified by the numbers 01 to 24. To differentiate between a boy and a girl, a G or a B has been added at the end of the identity number. For example, 02G is identified as participant two who is a girl.

Family structure

This section shows the composition of the families of individual learners.

Table 2: Family structure

	SEX	AGE	PERCENTAGE SCORE	FAMILY STRUCTURE		
				MOTHER	FATHER	NUMBER OF SIBLINGS
01	M	15	77	Aunt	None	0
02	F	16	70	Mother	None	1
03	F	16	69	Sister	None	1
04	F	16	67	Mother	None	3
05	M	17	67	Mother	*Father	1
06	F	16	66	Mother	Father	0
07	M	21	65	Mother	Father	4
08	M	16	64	Mother	Father	3
09	F	15	52	Aunt	None	2
10	M	15	52	Mother	*Father	1
11	F	16	50	Mother	*Father	2
12	M	16	50	*Mother	Father	1
13	F	15	50	Mother	Father	1
14	M	15	50	Mother	None	1
15	F	15	50	Mother	None	1
16	M	17	50	Cousin	None	2
17	F	16	44	Mother	Father	4
18	M	17	44	*Mother	*Father	1
19	M	15	43	Mother	*Father	0
20	F	18	42	None	None	1
21	M	17	42	Mother	*Father	3
22	F	15	41	Mother	None	0
23	M	18	41	Mother	Father	5
24	F	17	41	Aunt	None	4

* refers to a parent that stays away from home.

'None' means that the mother or father is dead.

Learners' families were structured in a range of different ways as is shown in Table 2. These include families headed by both parents, single parents, guardians and children.

Nearly half of the twenty four participants do not stay with both parents for the greater part of the year. The reason for this is that fathers are either away or deceased. In these families, women are left behind as household heads. An equal number of boys and girls stay in female headed families. A quarter of the participants are orphans living with guardians.

Families are generally relatively small: seventeen of the learners have fewer than three siblings. In most cases, the siblings are also high school students.

Sources of household income

This section shows the kinds of employment that those who provide financial support for learners are engaged in, as an indicator of household income. Various members of the learners' families contribute financially towards the education of the learners. In the families of seventeen of the learners, at least one person is formally employed, i.e. drawing a salary. These are parents, siblings, or relatives, as shown in Table 3 below. Most of these family members occupy low paying jobs such as factory workers, mine workers, sub-contracted brick layers and attendants at barber shops.

Six of the learners' families subsist on informal income from vending, hawking, room letting and piece jobs. One mother lives on a study sponsorship. One child lives with a younger sibling on life insurance from the death of their parents. One family owns a landscaping business and nursery school, and is better off than the others.

Most parents do manage to pay school fees but cannot afford to pay for out of school activities that supplement school lessons. Though it is compulsory to pay for books at the school, many parents cannot afford to pay for them and not all learners have got school books.

Table 3: Parents' income in relation to type of employment

	SEX	AGE	% SCORE	EMPLOYMENT	MOTHER	FATHER	OTHER
01	M	15	77	Nurse	-	-	Aunt
02	F	16	70	Tailor	Mother	-	-
03	F	16	69	Factory worker	-	-	Sister and cousin
04	F	16	67	Fruit vendor	Mother	-	-
05	M	17	67	Mine worker		Father	-
06	F	16	66	Clothing hawker, food vendor	Mother	Father	-
07	M	21	65	House keeper	Mother		-
08	M	16	64	No fixed employment; both do piece jobs such as gardening or taking in laundry	Mother	Father	-
09	F	15	52	Lets rooms for rental	-		Aunt
10	M	15	52	Mine worker	-	Father	-
11	F	16	50	Mine worker	-	Father	-
12	M	16	50	Motor mechanic	-	Father	-
13	F	15	50	Soldier, civil servant	Mother	Father	-
14	M	15	50	Study sponsorship	Mother	-	-
15	F	15	50	Undertaker's agent	Mother	-	-
16	M	17	50	Barber assistant	-	-	Brother
17	F	16	44	Brick layer	-	Father	-
18	M	17	44	Factory worker	-	-	Mother
19	M	15	43	Mine worker	-	Father	-
20	F	18	42	No parents, child lives with younger sibling on parents' life insurance money	-	-	-
21	M	17	42	Mine worker, truck driver	-	Father	Brother
22	F	15	41	Barber assistant	Mother	-	-
23	M	18	41	Owens a landscaping business and a nursery school	Mother	Father	
24	F	17	41	Factory worker	-	-	Aunt

Parent-child relationships conducive to studying

This section presents data relating to relationships between parents and learners in this study with regard to their interaction about home and school work. More than half of the parents are perceived by the learners to have positive relationships with the

learners, but communication within these relationships does not focus on schoolwork. The relationships focus on the general well being of learners at home. The majority of these learners claim that they have a good relationship with their mothers because they take care of them. These mothers are approachable, and learners are able to discuss their social problems with them. Learner 13F remarks on the positive relationship she has with her mother. She states:

I am free to talk to my mother about things that I cannot talk about to my father. She is easy to talk to because I love her. She is approachable and does not question a lot. She is very friendly with me and likes passing jokes with me. I am also very free when I talk to her.

The majority of learners have more positive relationships with their mothers than with their fathers. Only two learners have fathers who are perceived to be interested in their schooling, expressed in positive interactions regarding their home or school work. It is rare to find a learner who lives with both parents and interacts positively with them both about school work. Only one of the twenty-four participants, learner 11F, has the experience of interacting positively with both parents about school work, although this only applies when her father is at home as he works in the mines and is away much of the time.

This learner provides the following examples of typical interactions with her mother and father.

Mother:

- S. She sometimes asks me whether I understood Maths, a particular topic we did in class that day, then I tell her if I understood or not.
- L. Why does she ask you about Mathematics?
- S. It is because she knows that Mathematics is difficult for me
- L. What does she do if you do not understand the topic?
- S. She usually says that we should request help from our teachers.

Father:

- L. Does your father ask you about the topic you did in class?
- S. He asks about Mathematics topics. You see he knows Maths; therefore, he asks and helps us with Mathematics when he is at home.

- L. Does he ask you whether any topic was interesting?
- S. No, he likes asking about Maths when he is at home. One thing he likes asking about is our marks. He asks about our marks when he sees our progress reports.
- L. OK, that's interesting, say more about that.
- S. OK, like I said he is harsh with us, he scolds us when our marks are very low and encourages us to work hard.

While both boys and girls have more positive relationship with mothers than fathers, boys have more conflictual relationships with the fathers than do girls. Eight of the nine boys who have both parents, have a harsh relationship with their fathers. Typically, their interactions with their fathers focus on regulation of their general behaviour, and not specifically on school work. Learner 21M provides an example of an interaction he had with his father that is focused on general behavior rather than on school work. He comments:

You see, he likes to ask me whether I am well behaved in class. Yah! He asks me whether I obey the school regulations, my teachers and even my classmates. Like I said his concern is usually about my behavior at school. Although he supports my schooling, he is not educated; he wants to see us educated.

Nearly half of the nine fathers have a relationship with their boys where they mainly interact about school fees. The boys perceive their fathers as being worried that they might lose the money they pay for their boys' schooling if they perform badly in their studies. They focus on this issue, and not on the actual school work. Though the girls' relationship with their fathers is not a conflictual one, it is not necessarily focused on school work, except in one case.

The parents of eight learners do not help with school work at all; these children believe that their parents have no interest in their school work. Learner 08M comments on the type of relationship he has with his father:

My father does not have any interest in our school work. In most cases he is proud of the youngest child. It's like [pause and breathing deeply].... I have been reading my school books a lot the whole of this week at school until around five. Then I arrive home at quarter to six in the evening. He shouts at me as if I was going about with girls.

He does not ask politely, given that I told him that I stay behind to read because it is noisy at home.

The majority of parents do communicate with their children about homework as shown in Table 4 above, although they do not actively help them in doing it. Their communication with their children is not focused on the content of the homework.

Table 4: Parent-child relationships conducive to studying

	SEX	AGE	% SCORE	COMMUNICATION ABOUT SCHOOLWORK		COMMUNICATION ABOUT HOMEWORK		BEST RELATIONSHIP
				MOTHER	FATHER	MOTHER	FATHER	
01	M	15	77	Always	None	Always	None	Cousin brother
02	F	16	70	Always	None	Always	None	Mother
03	F	16	69	Always	None	Sometimes	None	Sister
04	F	16	67	Sometimes	None	Sometimes	None	Mother
05	M	17	67	Sometimes	Never	Sometimes	Never	Mother
06	F	16	66	Always	Sometimes	Sometimes	Never	Mother
07	M	21	65	Sometimes	Sometimes	Never	Never	Mother
08	M	16	64	Never	Never	Never	Never	Mother
09	F	15	52	Grandmother Sometimes	None	Sometimes	None	Grand mother
10	M	15	52	Always	Never	Sometimes	Never	Mother
11	F	16	50	Never	Sometimes	Sometimes	Never	Mother
12	M	16	50	Never	Sometimes	Sometimes	Never	Sister
13	F	15	50	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sister Sometimes	Sometimes	Mother
14	M	15	50	Sometimes	None	Sometimes	None	Mother
15	F	15	50	Sometimes	None	Never	None	Mother
16	M	17	50	Never	None	Never	None	Sister
17	F	16	44	Sometimes	Never	Sometimes	Never	Brother
18	M	17	44	Rarely	Never	Sometimes	Never	Grand mother
19	M	15	43	(Brother) Sometimes	Never	Sometimes	Never	Mother
20	F	18	42	None	None	None	None	None
21	M	17	42	(Sister) Sometimes	Sometimes	(Sister) Never	Sometimes	Mother
22	F	15	41	Always	None	Sometimes	None	Mother
23	M	18	41	Always	Never	Sometimes	Never	Mother
24	F	17	41	Never	None	None	Sometimes	Grand mother

'None' refers to non existent mother or father

'Never' refers to a parent present but never communicate

Typically it involves little more than a reminder to do the homework. Learner 06F provides an example of such an interaction:

I like to have further discussion with my mother about school work because sometimes when she talks about the assignment, she reminds me of doing it and also motivates me to work hard. In particular, she reminds us how important education is and the fact that she is the sole breadwinner and we should take advantage of the little she is able to provide for us while she is still alive.

This section of the analysis suggests that, for this group of learners, communication between learners and their mothers about school and homework is associated with high achievement. However, this communication may take the form of expressions of interest rather than actual help.

Parents' educational status

This section presents the educational qualifications of parents or guardians of this group of learners, i.e. of the adult in the home who looks after the child. Only two learners did not know their fathers' qualifications.

On the whole, parents' educational levels were relatively low and most have not studied beyond Form C. Learners are aware that the low education of their parents hinders them from assisting them with school work. Learner 11F, whose mother and father have studied up to the end of primary school and Form C respectively, describes how her parents are unable to help her with school work.

She states:

My mother does not ask me about what I do in class [including topics done in class]. She also does not ask me whether the topic was interesting. She sometimes asks me whether I understand Maths, about a particular topic we did in class that day, then I tell her if I understood or not. If I did not understand, she usually says that we should request help from our teachers since she is not educated enough to help me with school or homework.

Table 5: Parents' qualifications

	SEX	AGE	% SCORE	PARENT GUARDIAN'S ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS	OR RELATION TO LEARNER
01	M	15	77	Form E	Aunt
02	F	16	70	Form E	Mother
03	F	16	69	Form C	Sister
04	F	16	67	Form C	Mother
05	M	17	67	Form C	Mother and father
06	F	16	66	Form C	Mother and father
07	M	21	65	Form C	Mother and father
08	M	16	64	Form C	Mother and father
09	F	15	52	Primary	Aunt
10	M	15	52	Form E	Mother [Father unknown]
11	F	16	50	Primary	Mother
				Form C	Father
12	M	16	50	Form E	Father
				Primary	Mother
13	F	15	50	University Degree	Father
				University Diploma	Mother
14	M	15	50	University	Mother
15	F	15	50	Form C	Mother
16	M	17	50	Form E	Cousin
17	F	16	44	Primary	Mother and father
18	M	17	44	Primary	Grandmother [Both Mother and father unknown]
19	M	15	43	Primary	Mother and father
20	F	18	42	None	No parents
21	M	17	42	Primary	Mother and father
22	F	15	41	Primary	Mother
23	M	18	41	Form E	Mother and father
24	F	17	41	Primary	Aunt

Although parents have a limited capacity to help their children with school work in general they are sometimes willing and able to help with particular subjects, especially Sesotho grammar. They lack content knowledge in other subjects. Learner 07M describes how his father only helps him in Sesotho. He explains:

Well, he sometimes helps me with Sesotho. It is the only subject he is capable of helping me with. OK, he sometimes asks me how well I am doing in Sesotho. If I have an assignment, I tell him. Then he will happily help me. You see I do not understand Sebopeho-Puo [Sesotho

grammar], he knows it. He usually explains some things I do not understand when he is in the right mood. [Pause] Rather, when he is willing to help me.

Nearly half of the learners have siblings that are more educated than their parents are. The parents of these learners usually advise their children to seek help from those siblings. As a result, almost half of the participants receive more help with their school work from siblings than from parents. Learner 11F comments on how her mother usually advises her to seek help from her sister:

She sometimes asks whether I understand Maths, about a particular topic we did in class that day, then I tell her if I understood or not. If I did not understand, she usually asks me to request help from my sister as my mother is not educated.

Parents' contact with the school

This section shows the frequency and type of school meetings parents or guardians of learners in this study attended in 2004.

At this school, there are two formal opportunities for parents to go to the school each year. These are meetings that are organized by the school. At one meeting the financial report is presented and at another meeting parents meet with teachers in the presence of their children. The school encourages parents or guardians to attend these meetings. These meetings are compulsory, in that students are punished if parents do not attend. The principal explains:

The purpose of the parents' meeting is to give an account of the financial report. The most important ones are those that require both the parents and their children to attend without failure. This is where each learner and their parent meet with various subject teachers to look back and reflect on the June tests. It is for the purpose of trying to help the children with a variety of study habits and strategies aimed at improving performance at the end of the year.

Table 6: Parents' attendance at school meetings

	SEX	AGE	% SCORE	ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOL MEETINGS	
				FINANCIAL REPORT	PARENT/ GUARDIAN - LEARNER-TEACHER
01	M	15	77	Always	Always
02	F	16	70	Always	Always
03	F	16	69	Always	Always
04	F	16	67	Sometimes	Always
05	M	17	67	Always	Always
06	F	16	66	Never	Always
07	M	21	65	Always	Always
08	M	16	64	-	Always
09	F	15	52	Never	Always
10	M	15	52	Never	Always
11	F	16	50	Sometimes	Always
12	M	16	50	Sometimes	Always
13	F	15	50	Always	Always
14	M	15	50	Never	Always
15	F	15	50	Never	Never
16	M	17	50	Never	Never
17	F	16	44	Never	Always
18	M	17	44	Never	Always
19	M	15	43	Never	Always
20	F	18	42	None	Always*
21	M	17	42	Sometimes	Always
22	F	15	41	Sometimes	Always
23	M	18	41	Never	Always
24	F	17	41	Sometimes	Always

* Learner 20F had neither a parent nor a guardian. However, to avoid punishment, she asked a friend's parent to represent her at the meetings.

Among the parents of the twenty-four learners, twenty-two attended the meeting where individual teachers meet with the parent and the child in 2004. The principal explained in an informal discussion that the parents attend this meeting with individual teachers even during the week so that their names would appear on the parents' meeting attendance register. Parents attend this meeting so that their children can avoid punishment.

Nearly half of the parents of the learners in this study attended the financial report meeting in 2004. The remainder did not attend as they had other commitments, such as work and caring for other family members, which hindered them from attending the meeting. While learners were punished if parents did not attend the other meeting, they were less likely to be punished if parents did not attend this meeting.

At the parents' meeting where both the learner and the parent meet with individual subject teachers, the teachers suggest various learning strategies that are believed to improve learners' academic performance. Parents are encouraged to adopt these strategies at home.

Among the whole group of twenty-two families that attended the meetings at this school in 2004, there was only one case where both mother and father attended both the parents' meetings together. These parents took it upon themselves to implement some of the strategies at home that teachers had suggested. Respondent 13F comments on the regular attendance of her parents at the parents' meetings and on how they apply the strategies:

My parents come to school for every parents' meeting. Every child comes to school with their parents to meet with all subject teachers to discuss any problems, either at school or at home. They, no-no-no-no, we discuss those problems, and parents or teachers or both come up with possible solutions in order to help improve the techniques of studying both at home and at school. My parents suggested that we try some of the strategies at home. Eh-h-h-h, I do things according to a time-table that everybody in my family remind me about.

This family is an exception. According to learners in this group, the majority of parents do not implement the suggested strategies at home.

The majority of parents do not visit the school at any other time besides attending the parents' meetings organized by the school. Those who do visit the school do so for reasons that do not relate to their children's school or home work. These include:

- Coming to check whether their children have arrived at school;
- Coming to attend to the misbehavior of their children at school and
- Dropping off lunch boxes or money for transport.

Homework

This section discusses the conditions of homework support at home.

Table 7: Homework: Time, space and helper

	SEX	AGE	%SCORE	HOMEWORK		
				Helper	Time	Living Space
01	M	15	77	Brother	Enough	Large
02	F	16	70	Mother	Plenty	Small
03	F	16	69	Sister	Plenty	Small
04	F	16	67	Sister, Brother	Plenty	Small
05	M	17	67	Nobody	Not enough	Small
06	F	16	66	Aunt	Plenty	Large
07	M	21	65	Students	Not enough	Small
08	M	16	64	Sister	Plenty	Large
09	F	15	52	Student	Enough	Small
10	M	15	52	Mother	Enough	Small
11	F	16	50	Sister	Enough	Large
12	F	16	50	Sister	Enough	Small
13	F	15	50	Sister, Father, Mother	Enough	Small
14	M	15	50	Student	Not enough	Small
15	F	15	50	Sister	Enough	Large
16	M	17	50	Nobody	Not enough	Small
17	F	16	44	Brother	Not enough	Small
18	M	17	44	Aunt	Not enough	Small
19	M	15	43	Brother	Not enough	Small
20	F	18	42	Student	Enough	Small
21	M	17	42	Sister	Enough	Small
22	F	15	41	Friends	Not enough	Small
23	M	18	41	Brother	Not enough	Large
24	F	17	41	Brother	Enough	Large

The terms 'enough', 'not enough', 'plenty', 'large', 'small' etc reflect learners' perceptions of the adequacy of the available space and time for homework. Learners provided more extensive descriptions of the circumstances in which they studied, and these responses were categorized in this way. For example, if a learner explained that he or she was able to study in a separate room from where the family were doing other things such as talking, preparing and eating supper, the space was categorized as 'large'. On the other hand, if a learner occupied a corner of a table in a room where other activities took place at the same time, the space was categorized as 'small'.

Small space refers to unavailability of a quiet room to study without much disturbance from other family members.

Most learners do homework at home and not at school. Twenty learners said they do homework at home so that they could get help from others with the homework that they cannot tackle on their own. The majority of these learners are helped by their classmates, friends from other schools, or siblings, and not by their parents. Only one of the high and two middle achieving learners, regularly receive homework assistance from their parents. Where parents assist with homework, they usually help with Sesotho as earlier indicated, although homework is regularly given in other school subjects, mostly in Business Education.

Many parents do not feel competent to help with the content of homework and so focus instead on reminding learners of the importance of doing it. Some parents also ensure that learners set aside time to do homework by restricting their out of school activities.

Comparison between high and low achievers with regard to forms of parental assistance

Up to this point, the analysis has focused on the whole group of 24 learners. In this section, two sub groups of learners will be compared. One sub group comprises the eight highest achieving learners, while the other comprises the eight lowest achieving learners. Each sub group includes four girls and four boys. The middle achieving eight learners were not included in this comparison. The purpose was to identify differences between high and low achieving learners, and these patterns emerged more strongly when the middle group was excluded.

In this group of learners, academic performance is strongly associated with how much the learners talked with their parents about home or school work. Most of the high achievers in this study regularly discuss their home and school work with at least one of their parents or guardians. They talk about school and schoolwork informally more often with mothers or female guardians than with fathers or male guardians. They talk about the importance of the school. The discussion is at times initiated by the parents.

For instance, the parents ask the learners to seek help from their teachers if they do not understand their school work. Sometimes these parents, especially mothers, encourage and motivate their children to work hard. In some cases, during casual communication, the mothers identify specific difficulties that their children have in a subject such as Mathematics. When they feel competent to do so, the parents of these learners actively help learners with their homework.

Six of the eight high achievers have a relatively warm relationship with at least one of their parents, usually the mother. The relationship entails parents who show general interest in their children's school and homework. These high achievers know that they are expected by their parents to do their school work even when they do not feel like doing it. These parents also limit the time that their children spend on activities that are not related to schoolwork in order to devote more time to doing school or homework. In this sense, these parents have a strict relationship with their children. Within this relationship, parents do not necessarily physically help their children with school work. They exercise their authority over their children in scheduling their school work, and this shows a general interest in their children's school work.

On the other hand, the low achievers rarely discuss schoolwork with their parents. Though most of the low achieving learners have an open relationship with their parents, communication does not focus on school work. Instead, learners talk to their parents about matters that do not relate to school work such as problems or misunderstandings with friends. As a result, these learners are more likely to turn to their schoolmates and siblings for help.

Given that fathers are either unavailable or not very communicative, communication with fathers does not seem to account for differences in performance. However, there was one exception referred to earlier, where a father was actively involved with a high performing learner.

There is a strong association, in this group, between the level of parental education and learners' achievement. All the high achieving learners have at least one parent who has completed Form C, the final level of basic education in Lesotho. Though these parents are not very highly educated, they have some insights into their

children's work as they have studied up to the level at which their children are studying. In addition, the parents who give regular homework support to their children are those that have completed Form E and University education.

On the other hand, all low achieving learners, with only one exception, have parents with only primary education. These parents are less likely to be able to help their children in school work because they have only studied to a level that is lower than that of their children.

Even though family sizes were not substantially different - five of the eight high achieving learners belong to smaller families with a maximum of two children and five of the eight low achievers come from larger families with three to six children – learners from larger families are likely to experience less favourable study conditions, with less space and time available for homework. However, some of the siblings of the high achieving learners provide academic assistance that their parents are not able to offer. Some of the siblings who help the learners in this study are recruited by the parents who are not competent to offer help. Thus, in this way parents of high achieving learners express a more general interest in their school.

Though the majority of parents of this group of learners are employed in very low paying jobs, there are differences in spending on the children's education. Three of the eight higher achieving learners attended extra lessons to supplement their school work. Parents paid for these classes. Within these three families, learners also have a positive relationship with their parents and are able to communicate with them about school work. This communication provided the opportunity for learners to tell parents that they were struggling with particular subjects, and parents - who did not feel competent to help learners themselves – decided to pay for extra classes to address the problem.

The majority of parents of the low achievers also earn low incomes as do the parents of the high achievers. However, not a single low achieving learner participates in after school classes. For instance, one learner has parents who run a nursery school and a landscaping firm, and who thus earn relatively more than the other parents in this study. These parents do not supplement their child's studies even though this learner

performs badly. According to three of the low achieving learners, their parents feel that paying school fees is the only way they need to demonstrate their accountability to their children. Consequently these parents refuse to help their children with school work.

All but two parents of the learners in this study attended one of the school meetings for parents. However, more parents of high achieving learners than low achieving learners also attended the second meeting, and in this way expressed a more general and voluntary interest in the school.

Mini case studies

This section presents mini case studies of four learners, two of whom achieved high marks and two of whom achieved low marks in the 2004 year end examinations. These case studies illustrate how different factors, such as parent-child communication and deploying other cultural and material resources, are linked in the lives of learners

Case study one

Thabo is a boy who is fifteen years old. He scored the highest average mark in Form B in December 2004. Both his parents are deceased. He stays with his aunt and her two children who are aged seventeen and ten. Though Thabo stays with his aunt, his uncle takes full responsibility for him with regard to providing money for transport, food and clothing. The aunt provides accommodation and sometimes money to pay for small school charges other than the main school fee that is paid by the government fund for orphaned children.

At home, Thabo has a close relationship with his aunt's eldest child. However, he reports that it is usually the aunt who asks him about what he has been doing in class. The aunt usually checks how Thabo is coping with his school work with regard to marks he gets in class work and tests. Then, depending on how he performed, she usually motivates and encourages Thabo to work hard. The following extract illustrates how Thabo's aunt encourages him.

- L. Does she ask you whether you understood the topic?
- S. No, she doesn't do or say anything.
- L. Does she ask you about anything about your class work?
- S. No she doesn't.
- L. What about marks, does she ask you about your marks?
- S. Well, when we have written a test, I usually show her my scripts.
- L. Why do you like it when your aunt asks you about marks you got in class?
- S. It is because she usually encourages me to even work harder.

Thabo and his aunt communicate about homework more than they do about schoolwork, though the aunt does not help him with it. In their discussion, his aunt usually asks Thabo whether he understands whatever he would be doing in his homework. Since Thabo's eldest cousin is a senior secondary learner, his mother usually asks him to help Thabo with school work which he does not understand. The following extract illustrates this communication between Thabo and his aunt:

- L. Does your aunt ask you about homework?
- S. Yes, she sometimes does. While I am doing homework, she usually asks me whether I understand what I am doing.
- L. Then what does she do if you do not understand?
- S. She asks my [cousin] brother to help me.

Besides the open interaction between them, his aunt usually knows his whereabouts during the week and during weekends. He reads and does schoolwork every day and every weekend though his aunt still expects him to participate in chores during these times. He has sufficient time and space to do his homework at home. Nobody from Thabo's family attends parents' meetings at the school.

In summary, while Thabo is an orphan and cared for by someone who cannot help him with homework herself or pay for additional resources, he does benefit from being with someone who takes an interest in his school work, ensures that he has sufficient opportunity to do his homework and recruits others to help him where needed. This minimal support is sufficient to enable Thabo to score the highest marks in his grade.

Case study two

Lerato is a girl aged sixteen. She scored the second highest average score in Form B in December 2004. She stays with her mother and younger brother. Her father is deceased. Her mother expects her to participate in chores at home every day.

Her mother has studied up to Form E and works at a tailor, which is one of the lowest paying jobs in Lesotho. The mother is responsible for paying Lerato's fees. In addition, her mother pays for the mathematics extra classes that Lerato attends everyday after school and every Saturday. Lerato knew about the extra classes through her mother who registered her for the classes without her knowledge at the beginning of the year. This was in response to their earlier informal communication, when Lerato complained that, of all her subjects, she had the most difficulty with Mathematics.

Lerato has an open relationship with her mother. They communicate directly about schoolwork and her mother helps her mostly in Mathematics and Science homework because, as Lerato indicates, "she [the mother] knows and likes them". In these informal interactions, her mother usually asks,

which teachers dodged the classes that day; if all teachers attended she asks which lessons were present on the timetable that day. If Science happens to be present, she asks me what we did because she knows that they are problematic.

Lerato's mother is very strict at times. When Lerato chats with her sister for long periods of time, her mother usually orders her to read her school books if she does not have any homework to do. She often tries to motivate her daughter to work hard, as Lerato recalls:

sometimes when she talks about the assignments, she reminds me of doing them and also motivates me to work hard. Especially because she always reminds us how important education is and the fact that she is the sole breadwinner and we should take advantage of the little she is able to provide for us while she is still alive.

Though Lerato's mother is very interactive about schoolwork at home, she does not attend parents' meetings and does not go to Lerato's school other than to collect the progress report.

Though there is little living space at Lerato's home, she has enough time to do homework at home. She spends most of the time at home doing schoolwork alone and rarely with friends.

In summary, Lerato – like Thabo – benefits from the positive attention of an interested adult who ensures that she has the time and space to do homework. Unlike Thabo, Lerato received direct help from her mother who is also able and willing to pay for extra lessons.

Case study three

Teboho is an eighteen year old boy who stays with his mother and father, two sisters, three brothers and his grandmother. His 2004 marks were the lowest in the group. Both his parents have studied up to Form E. His father runs a business for landscaping and cleaning, while the mother runs a nursery school.

Teboho has a better relationship with his mother than with the father. However, the relationship is not focused on school work. According to him, he has a warm relationship with his mother and comments, "you see, female people are not as harsh as men, they are friendly and understanding".

Teboho's mother becomes involved in his school work by checking on the dates written on his books. The purpose of checking these dates, according to Teboho, is usually to find out whether he attends classes when he goes to school. Sometimes she talks about his marks when she receives his progress report. If he failed badly, his mother usually encourages him to improve the next time. However, Teboho also points out that he only talks with his mother about "necessary things, especially those that involve the family", meaning his misbehaviour. Thus, while communication is at times positive, it is limited and tends to relate to disciplinary matters.

On the other hand, Teboho has a conflictual relationship with his father. He does not even want other children to communicate with him about school work in the presence of his father. He comments on the reasons why he avoids communication with his brother about homework.

You see, when he asks me about homework in the presence of my father, I know that my father is going to scold me if say, I have not done it and it's late at night. It is because my father does not believe that I am capable of waking up early in the morning to do my schoolwork, or I am capable of going to bed very late.

Teboho's father interacts minimally with him about school or homework.

Teboho has both opportunities and enough time to work at home. However, he believes that he is not able to sustain attention on reading for long periods of time, therefore, he does not spend long periods of time reading at home. During weekends he does schoolwork only on Saturdays and not on Sundays. His parents are not pleased with that, but Teboho usually tells her mother that, "Sunday is the time for me to rest away from schoolbooks". The mother, as Thabo reports, scolds him but "she cannot do anything about it. I usually go and play football and then loiter about with my friends before I go home late in the evening." He also points out that, "I know it is bad but [*rubbing his hands*] I still do it".

Teboho's mother attends the parents' meetings alone and his father has never attended. She has also been summoned to the school to be informed that Teboho had misbehaved. Teboho mentioned that, "she had to come to his school for something that concerned me and one teacher."

Teboho has a brother who has successfully completed Form E and is ready to go to University. His brother helps him with schoolwork at times, but Teboho prefers to do his homework with his friends.

In summary, Teboho's home circumstances are not dramatically different from those of learners who achieve high marks even though conditions are relatively crowded. However, he lacks confidence in his own competence and this view is reinforced in

negative interactions with his father while his mother is not able to counter this. While there are material and cultural resources available, in that his parents are less poor than are other parents and have both completed secondary schooling, these resources are not utilized to support Teboho's school and homework. What seems to be missing is a relationship with a caregiver who is both strong and positive enough to help Teboho to take advantage of these resources.

Case study four

Neo is a seventeen year old girl both of whose parents are deceased. Her 2004 mark was the lowest in the group. She stays with her grandmother and her four elder siblings. Her elder sister is the only member of the family who works, at a textile factory. She supports the whole family. She helps the child financially for transport fare, food and shelter while school fees are paid for by the government fund for orphaned children. Though Neo stays with her grandmother, disciplinary matters are taken care of by her parents' former friend who stays at a village about two kilometers from her grandmother's house.

Neo has the best relationship with her grandmother who views her as being better behaved than her siblings. However, this open relationship is not focused on schoolwork. The grandmother did not complete primary school herself. Her sister only rarely interacts with her about school by asking her whether she is going to pass at the end of the year. The brother also seldom pays attention to her schoolwork and only very occasionally reminds her to do her homework.

Neo does homework at home late in the evening as she attends girls' football practice every day after school, then arrives home late. She spends a maximum of thirty minutes doing homework in the evening unsupervised and without any help. Both her grandmother and sister have opposed her participation in sports on the grounds that she does not have enough time to study. However, she will not stop taking part because she has committed herself to playing for both the school and home teams.

Nobody in Neo's family attends school meetings, except her grandmother who has only attended once since she arrived at the school and then only to collect the progress report.

In summary, Neo has very limited cultural or material support to draw on. She does not have access to help or an established place, time and routine for homework and no one pays sustained positive attention to her progress.

CHAPTER FIVE - CONCLUSIONS

The study focuses on forms of assistance and features of family life associated with different levels of achievement in a group of Form C learners at a high school in Lesotho.

Chapter one describes the Lesotho educational context along with its problems as well as the local context of the school under study.

In the literature review, chapter two, particular forms of parental assistance and features of family life are derived from the literature to guide the analysis. These forms and features are:

- Parent-child relationship;
- Parent-child communication;
- Time spent on homework;
- Parental participation in school activities;
- Educational status of parents;
- Parents' income and
- Family structure.

This review suggests that the kinds of support, facilities and resources that children receive at home have a strong impact on their performance at school. However this literature is based largely on research in developed countries.

The analysis develops an account of ways in which factors identified in the literature are manifest in the lives of 24 Form C children at one school in Lesotho, a developing country. In this analysis, these seven forms and features are reduced to six, as parent-child communication is subsumed into the discussion of child-parent relationship and time spent on homework.

Discussion

Parents and guardians of learners in this study are not in a position to offer high levels of material support of the kinds discussed in the international literature. Social and economic factors tend to constrain parents with regard to the kinds and degree of help that they are able to offer their children.

Most learners stay with one parent in relatively small families. Most households are headed by female parents or guardians as the male parents are either deceased or away. This mortality rate may be due to AIDS; according to the 2004 Report on the global AIDS epidemic there is a high mortality among adults (15-49) in Lesotho, with more men than women dying as a result of AIDS. Many men also stay away from their families for temporary employment on the mines in South Africa.

Eleven of the 24 learners in this study do not have fathers. Five of the thirteen fathers are mine workers. In this study, those fathers who were present tended not to help their children with school work to the same extent as mothers did. While the study does not provide reasons for this, it is reasonable to suggest that this is an expression of perceived gender roles in a largely patriarchal society.

Women who are heads of households face greater challenges in caring for families and helping with homework than they would if fathers were present. These challenges are greater still where families are poor. Parents and guardians in these families are either unemployed, casual workers or work in very low paying jobs though a few, including a nurse, policeman and small business owner - are better off. The families of eighteen of the learners in the study derive their income from informal employment. It is difficult for these families to supplement their children's learning by providing books and extra classes.

In this context, the government, the school and the families have developed numerous strategies to support learning in general and homework in particular. At national level, the government promotes the idea of schooling as a human right. Recent policies have aimed to extend the provision of basic primary and secondary level by reducing the costs of schooling. Primary school fees have been eliminated and, at the lower

secondary level, the government has introduced a textbook rental scheme to reduce the cost of text books. This has enabled more learners to take textbooks home.

The school at which this study was conducted ensures that all parents attend school meeting by imposing punishment on learners when their parents do not attend. While all may not agree with this strategy, it has proven to be effective in ensuring that parents and guardians attend meetings. At these meetings, individual subject teachers discuss forms of homework support with parents.

At the level of the community, learners whose parents are deceased or absent are frequently supported and cared for by extended family members or friends. Five of the learners in this study are being looked after by relatives who are not their parents. A sixth, who is an orphan and is not being looked after by a relative, nevertheless manages to persuade a friend's parent to attend school meetings on her behalf.

In terms of material support, what matters is not only whether families have resources but also how they use them. In this study, the family with the most material resources did not spend money on extra classes, while three poorer families did. The learners from these three families are all in the higher achieving group while the child from the wealthier family is in the lower achieving group. However, most parents of low achieving learners have very limited resources with which to supplement schooling.

The majority of parents and guardians in this study did not complete their secondary schooling, which undermines their capacity to help learners with homework. Six out of eight parents of low achieving learners in this study have only primary education. On the other hand all the parents or guardians of high achieving learners have some secondary schooling, although six of these have only studied up to Form C. Parents with lower levels of education still attempt to help with the subjects of which they have some knowledge, especially Sesotho.

All the parents and guardians have developed strategies to supplement their own capacity to help learners. One strategy is to recruit learners' siblings to help them with homework. Sixteen of the twenty four learners receive more help with homework from siblings than from parents.

A second strategy is to ensure that learners set aside time and space to do homework. The majority of both high and low achieving learners in this study come from families with limited space to do homework. Seventeen learners live in small dwellings or in rented small rooms. However, the parents of high achieving learners control homework conditions such as time, space and routine more carefully. The parents of high achieving learners have a stricter relationship with their children than do parents of low achieving learners. These parents restrict their children's participation in activities that are not related to school work in order to ensure that learners spend more time on schoolwork.

A third strategy is to provide emotional support to learners. Fifteen learners in this study have good relationships with at least one of the parents or guardians. For both boys and girls, the relationships are better with mothers than fathers.

The literature suggests that warm supportive relationships between parents and children tend to be associated with higher achievement at school. This study suggests, however, that it is important to look not only at the general relationship but more specifically at the interactions that focus specifically on school work. The higher achieving learners are those who regularly discuss their school work with a parent or guardian, in a positive way. Those who report having a good relationship with a parent, but who do not specifically talk about school work to that parent, do not achieve as well. While six of the eight high achieving learners in this study have positive relationships with mothers that do focus on school work, more than half of the low achieving learners have relationships with mothers that do not focus on schoolwork. Fathers are less communicative about school work. They also tend to communicate with boys more often than girls. They communicate about school fees and the boys' behaviour and not about school and homework. In this group of 24 learners and thirteen fathers, only one father routinely discussed school work with his child.

Conclusion

This study opens a small window into the experiences of a group of learners in the Lesotho context. Parents in this study do not offer high levels of support of the kinds

discussed in the international literature. Nevertheless, the study suggests that parents and guardians who prioritize the use of available income for their children's education, and who provide motivation and encouragement to work hard within a warm relationship focused on schoolwork, seem to enhance the academic performance of learners. Furthermore, children whose parents have had even a few years of secondary schooling do better than those who have only primary school education or no education at all. Extended families add to the capacity of parents to support learners and older siblings are recruited to help younger siblings. Thus this study would suggest that, even where the social and material environment undermines the conditions for learning and for productive home work practices, the contribution of parents, guardians and families does make a difference.

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Appendices

Appendix A

The interview questions for learners

Name :

SCHOOL :

DAY :

TIME :

CLASS :

SEX :

(QUESTIONS)

Personal

- What is your name?
 - How old are you?
 - What class are you?
 - Can you explain to me what you did yesterday (previous day of school) after school before you got home?
 - Is this what you usually do everyday after school?
 - (If not) Please explain to me what other things you usually do after school before you get home?
 - Now, what about during weekends, what do you usually do?
 - Is this what you usually do every weekend?
 - (If not) Please explain to me what other things you usually do on weekends?
- (If what the learner does has nothing to do with schoolwork)

- Probe: Do you do any schoolwork on weekends?
How often do you do the schoolwork during weekends?

Family structure

- Who takes care of you everyday?
- Who takes responsibility for you?
- Who checks that you come home in time every night?
- If you were caught doing something naughty, who would deal with the matter?
- Who do you stay with throughout the year?
- (If not with both parents) Why do you not stay with your parents?
- (If not with one parent) Why do you not stay with the other parent?
- Do you have any siblings?
- How many
 - Sisters do you have?
 - Brothers do you have?
- Do you stay with them throughout the year?
- Who else do you stay with in your household throughout the year?

Parent-learner relationship – Communication

Identifying key person

- Which adult do you have the best relationship with at home?
- (If someone) Why do you have the best relationship with 'this person'?
- Does anybody (at home) usually ask you what you do in class?
- (If somebody) who asks you?

Identifying whether the communication is about the topic

- What question(s) does 'this person' (mention him or her) ask you?
- (If nobody) does nobody ever ask you about what you do in class throughout the year?
- Probes:
 - Does 'the person' ask you about the topic you did in class?

Further Probes:

- Whether the topic was interesting?

- Whether you understood the topic?
- Whether you like the topic?
- Do you like it when 'this person' asks you about the topic you did in class?
- Why do you / don't you like it (when 'this person' ask about the topic you did in class)
- Does 'the person' ask you anything about your class work?
- Do you like it when 'this person' asks you anything about what you do in class?
 - Probe: e.g., marks?
- Why do you / don't you like it (when 'this person' ask about anything you did in class /marks you got in class)

Identifying whether the communication is about homework

- Does 'the person' ask you about homework?
- Do you like it when 'this person' asks you about homework?
- Why do you / don't you like it (when 'this person' ask about homework)?
- Do you like to have further discussion about schoolwork with 'this person'?
- (If yes) Please explain why you like discussing further with 'this person' about the
 - Topic you did in class
 - Marks you got
 - Homework (and other things the learner may mention)
- Do you talk to 'this person' about things other than schoolwork?
- Do you find 'this person' easy to talk to.
- Probe
 - Why do you/don't you find him/her easy?
 - Does this person order (command) you to do your schoolwork?
 - Who is easy to talk to about schoolwork?
 - (If easy) Why is 'this person' easy to talk to?
 - (If not easy) Why is 'this person' not easy to talk to?

About gender of caregiver

- (If 'the person' is a male <or female> parent I asked the same questions about a female <or male> parent if present in the household) What about your mother/father, does she ask you what you did in class?
- If yes, I asked the same questions about this other person.

Ask the following if the learner has a male <or female> parent

- **【**What question(s) does 'this person' (mention him or her) ask you?
- (If nobody) does nobody ever ask you about what you do in class throughout the year?
- Probes:
 - Does 'the person' ask you about the topic you did in class?
- Further Probes:
 - Whether the topic was interesting?
 - Whether you understood the topic?
 - Whether you like the topic?
- Do you like it when 'this person' asks you about the topic you did in class?
- Why do you / don't you like it (when 'this person' ask about the topic you did in class)
- Does 'the person' ask you about anything about your class work?
- Do you like it when 'this person' asks you about (anything) what you do in class?
 - Probe: e.g., marks?
- Why do you / don't you like it (when 'this person' ask about the anything you did in class /marks you got in class)

Identifying whether the communication is about homework

- Does 'the person' ask you about homework?
- Do you like it when 'this person' asks you about homework?
- Why do you / don't you like it (when 'this person' ask about the homework)?
- Do you like to have further discussion about schoolwork with 'this person'?
- (If yes) Please explain why you like discussing further with 'this person' about the

- Topic you did in class
- Marks you got
- Homework (and other things the learner may mention)
- Do you talk to 'this person' about things other than the schoolwork?
- Do you find 'this person' easy to talk to.
- Probe
 - Why do you/don't you find him/her easy?
 - Does this person order you to do your schoolwork?]
- Who else asks you (at home) about the (school work) topic you did in class, marks you got, homework?
- Do you like it when 'this person' asks you about your schoolwork?
- Do you like to have further discussion about schoolwork with 'this person'?
- Is there anyone you talk to about schoolwork?
- (If nobody) Probe:
 - Do you never talk to anyone about your schoolwork?

Time spent on homework

- Who helps you most with homework?
- (If nobody) Probe:
 - Does anybody help you with homework?
- (If nobody) Probe:
 - Nobody ever helps you with homework!
- (If someone) Who?
- (If someone) How often does 'this person' help you with homework?
- Does anybody check whether homework is done?
- Where do you do your homework?
- Probe:
 - At school
 - At home
- (If at school) Why do you do your homework at school?
- (If at home) Do you have an opportunity to do homework at home?
- Do you have enough time to do homework at home?

- Can you estimate how long it usually takes you to do the homework at home?
- Probe:
 - What about yesterday?
- For which subject do you spend more time doing homework?
- Why?
- For which subject do you spend least time doing homework?
- Why?
- How do you spend most of your time during the week at home?
- (If with friends) Probe:
 - How do you spend your time with your friends (during the week)?
- (If not homework and/or schoolwork) Probe:
 - (a) Do you spend time doing homework?
 - (b) Do you spend time doing schoolwork?
- Further probes:
 - (c) Do your parents (person responsible for the child) know how you spend your time during the week?
 - (d) Do your parents (person responsible for the child) usually approve (support) that you visit friends during the week to do schoolwork?
- How do you spend most of your time during weekends at home?
- (If with friends) Probe:
 - How do you spend your time with your friends (during weekends)?
- (If not doing homework and/or schoolwork) Probe:
 - (a) Do you spend time doing homework?
 - (b) Do you spend time doing schoolwork?
- Further probes:
 - (c) Do your parents (person responsible for the child) know how you spend your time during weekends?
- (d) Do your parents (person responsible for the child) usually approve (support) that you visit friends during weekends to do schoolwork?

Parental participation in school activities

- Do your parents (person responsible for the learner) ever come to school?

- (If yes) What is their purpose of coming to school?
- Probe:
 - Is it to attend parent's meetings at your school?
 - Is it to attend parent-child-teacher meetings?
- How often does 'this person(s)' attend these activities?
- Probe:
 - This year.
 - Last year.
- Please explain whether 'this person(s)' ever comes to the school for anything other than for the activities you have mentioned?

Parental educational status

- What level of education has 'the person' (who helps learner with schoolwork) achieved?

Income and resources

- Who pays for your school fees [clothes, transport, food, i.e. Is economically responsible for your studies]
- (If someone else) Explain to me what type of job 'this person' is engaged with.
- (If someone else pays rather than parents, where parents are present) Why do your parents (mother and/or father) not pay for your school fees?
- (If parents present) Are your parents employed?
- (If parents present) Explain to me what types of jobs they are engaged with.
- How many people are working in your household?
- Do they help financially with your schooling?

